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For Immediate Release
January 18, 2006

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Second annual national report on cervical cancer prevention released *State improves from last year; Sen. Hammerstrom says more can be done*

LANSING – A national report released today shows that Michigan is ahead of some states, but is still missing critical opportunities in the fight against cervical cancer. According to the second annual report, “Progress Report 2006: the ‘State’ of Cervical Cancer Prevention in America,” issued by Women In Government, Michigan received a good rating, but scored only 56 percent out of a possible 100 percent. In 2005, the report rated Michigan as fair, assigning it a score of 44 percent.

“We should be encouraged that Michigan has improved since last year, but clearly we still need to do more, given that this type of cancer is actually preventable,” said state Sen. Beverly Hammerstrom, R-Temperance.

The report looked at current data for each state on cervical cancer rates, women’s access to screening using the most up-to-date technology, and the legislative priority being put on the issue.

“This report tells us that too many women in Michigan, and across the country, still remain unscreened or under-screened for cervical cancer,” Hammerstrom said. “We need to continue to increase our efforts to educate women about the importance of early detection. Since cervical cancer is the most preventable type of cancer, we need to stress the point that this is the first time we are able to essentially stop the disease before it starts.”

Hammerstrom, who served as chair of the organization’s board of directors from 2004 to 2005, was appointed to a national Cervical Cancer Task Force in 2003 where WIG members were educated about the disease and the virus shown to cause it, human papillomavirus, or HPV.

The 2006 report is part of a national “Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign,” launched in 2004 by WIG, a Washington, D.C. based organization representing state-level elected women officials. The ongoing campaign encourages state governments to pass legislation to improve cervical cancer prevention efforts. To date, 42 states have introduced legislation or resolutions targeting cervical cancer elimination and 36 states have enacted such measures.

According to the new report:

- Michigan’s incidence rate of cervical cancer is 8.1 per 100,000 women and its mortality rate is 2.1 per 100,000 women, which are both lower than the national averages.
- 86.5 percent of Michigan women have been screened for cervical cancer in the last three years.
- 86 percent of Michigan women have some type of health insurance, including Medicaid and Medicare.

- Michigan's Medicaid program covers HPV testing, newer technology, which screens for the cause of cervical cancer, along with a Pap test in routine screening of women age 30 and older.

Hammerstrom, who chairs the Senate Health Policy Committee, sponsored a Senate Resolution in 2004 encouraging the governor to appoint a cervical cancer task force in an effort to raise public awareness of the disease during the last legislative session. The resolution is still awaiting action by the governor.

"We have the opportunity right now to wipe out this disease," Hammerstrom said. "It is imperative that we act now to educate women on the importance of early screening. Finally, we have a way to stop one of the deadliest cancers that affects women. This is only the beginning. I urge the governor not to let this issue fall through the cracks. This issue is too important to place on the back burner. Let's do all we can to help ensure that no more Michigan women die from this deadly disease.

"While 86.5 percent of Michigan women say they were screened in the last three years, *all* women must be screened regularly and be educated about cervical cancer and human papillomavirus (HPV), the virus that causes it," according to the senator.

"We must better ensure that our screening programs use the most advanced and appropriate screening technologies available, such as HPV testing, which can improve upon the traditional Pap test in identifying women needing early intervention," Hammerstrom said. "I look forward to the governor naming a task force soon so that we may help ensure that no more Michigan women die of cervical cancer."

Also, according to the report:

- 20 states, including Michigan and the District of Columbia improved their grades and only two states' grades declined since 2005.
- No state received an "excellent" grade.
- Minnesota received the highest score with 81 percent.
- Tennessee received the lowest score (38 percent), followed by California, Idaho, Kentucky, South Dakota and West Virginia (each with 44 percent).

Approximately 80 percent of adults will contract HPV, the cause of cervical cancer, at some point in their lives. In the majority of women, the virus is cleared naturally by the body. But in certain cases, high-risk types of HPV persist, sometimes staying dormant in the body for months or even years before it becomes active, with the potential to cause cell changes on the cervix that can ultimately become cancerous. These persistent infections are most commonly found in women 30 and older.

Research shows that the Pap test's ability to detect cervical cancer or its early signs ranges from 51 to 85 percent. The FDA recently approved a new screening test for HPV infections, which, when used in conjunction with a Pap test in women age 30 and older, increases the accuracy of the Pap to almost 100 percent. If the FDA approves an HPV vaccine and it were widely used, it could contribute significantly to the reduction of cervical cancer worldwide.

The full report is featured on WIG's website. A link to the website, as well as current cervical cancer statistics and links to organizations such as the American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute are available on Hammerstrom's website at:

www.senate.michigan.gov/hammerstrom.

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